

**Testimony of
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Chairman
Broadcasting Board of Governors before the
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats
and International Relations
Committee on Government Reform
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for this important hearing on the 9/11 Commission recommendations on public diplomacy. We welcome your examination of U.S. Government efforts to conduct public diplomacy and to determine the status of efforts to adapt public diplomacy to the post 9/11 world.

Earlier this year, with the enthusiastic support of President Bush and Members of Congress, the Broadcasting Board of Governors launched Alhurra, "The Free One," our new 24-hour-a-day Arabic language television network.

Through direct-to-home satellite communication and terrestrial transmission in Iraq, we are able to broadcast directly to the people of the Middle East over five time zones in 22 countries, from Morocco to Iraq to Yemen.

Our broadcasts will not overnight eliminate the effects of generations of intellectual isolation and neglect so vividly outlined in the classic United Nations report, "Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society," on the dissemination of knowledge in the Arab world in contemplating what we have to overcome to establish real and substantive dialogue with our neighbors in the Arab world, it is daunting to consider the fact that the aggregate of Western books translated into Arabic since the dawn of publishing amounts to little more than 10,000 books – equivalent to what Spain translates in a single year.

Indeed, the United Nations report concluded that what we have to overcome in the region "is the absence of a strategic vision and societal incentives that provide a solid foundation for knowledge dissemination through education, media, publishing and translation."

The knowledge base for people in the Arab world is further limited by the indisputable fact that the news and information they have received from several popular satellite television – outlets like Al Jazeera – have given them a picture of the world which is frequently distorted by institutional prejudices and sensationalism. Against this backdrop, consider what people in the Arab world have been able to watch in recent weeks on Alhurra television.

For three consecutive days last week, Alhurra broadcast live sessions of the Iraqi National Congress in Baghdad. Iraqis observed their representatives freely debating the future of their nation – democracy in action – in stark contrast to the repression of the regime of Saddam Hussein. These broadcasts were not restricted to the people of Iraq. Throughout the Arab world,

people were able to see that freedom and democracy can exist within a Muslim country, that universal values can be embraced by Muslim societies.

Daily talk shows on Alhurra which present points of view across the political spectrum, including positions unsympathetic to our own, mean that for the first time, people in the Arab world see, hear, and participate in the foundations of democracy: we present, you decide. Alhurra is helping to frame the debate and the focus on issues facing the region. We will not win every argument on every political talk show, but as President Bush has said time and again, in the long run the truth is on our side. Moreover, we believe the very existence of free flowing debate on Alhurra will encourage the people to demand free, open, and objective presentations on indigenous Arab media outlets.

Consider the effects of in-depth Alhurra coverage of the genocide in the Darfur region in the Sudan. Long before the world had come to focus on this tragedy, Alhurra reporting teams were on the scene, which led other Arab media outlets to follow suit and make the events of Darfur a matter of serious concern to all people.

The ability to debunk anti-American conspiracy theories by credible Arab thinkers is worth the price of U.S.-financed satellite broadcasting. The truth is on our side.

In the midst of all this broadcasting, it is critical that accuracy be our standard. The people of the region aren't stupid. If we are slanting the news, they will figure it out. But if we establish long-term credibility on these broadcasts, people will begin to ask questions: What went wrong? What slowed the development of a civilization that once was far ahead of the West? What factors were behind the crushing absence of economic opportunities for youth in the Arab world? And we will be there to answer them.

Let me turn to Radio Sawa. To me, the most striking success of Sawa has been the widespread acceptance of Sawa news and public affairs programming as credible. According to surveys conducted earlier this year by ACNielsen, Radio Sawa was found to be a reliable source of news and information by 73 percent of its weekly listenership. In an era when Arab youth systematically boycott American products, they not only have widely accepted U.S.-sponsored radio, but they also accept its news as accurate and dependable.

I must pay tribute to fellow Board member Norman Pattiz, the father of Radio Sawa and an irrepressible force for international broadcasting. When Mr. Pattiz was in the process of creating Radio Sawa, he traveled throughout the Middle East to negotiate heretofore unattainable agreements for American AM and FM transmitters in Middle Eastern countries so that we could be heard on the radios of choice in the region. Thanks to his spirit – and a dedicated core of journalists led by news director Mouafac Harb – Radio Sawa has made a historic breakthrough in the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman, we deeply appreciate the favorable focus on what we've done in the 9/11 Commission report. The report said: "Recognizing that Arab and Muslim audiences rely on satellite television and radio, the government has begun some promising initiatives in television and radio broadcasting to the Arab world, Iran, and Afghanistan. These efforts are beginning to

reach large audiences. The Broadcasting Board of Governors has asked for much larger resources. It should get them.”

We are currently working with the Administration on potential radio and television strategies that will give us the same type of impact in the non-Arabic-speaking Muslim world as we are having in the Arabic-speaking Muslim world. We have made a good start. In Iran we’ve built on the popularity of VOA radio with the new 24/7 Radio Farda, which combines the talents of RFE/RL and VOA in the region. We have also had, thanks in no small part to the leadership of Board member Blanquita Cullum, a tremendous breakthrough with a new 30-minute daily TV show in Persian carried on VOA to Iran.

In Pakistan, thanks to the leadership of Board member Steve Simmons, we have expanded Urdu radio from three hours a day via shortwave, to 12 hours a day with an AM signal from the region. Called Radio Aap ki Duniya, this 12-hour-daily stream is designed to attract and inform younger radio listeners.

But we all recognize this is not enough. Our long-term plans include seeking new transmitters and satellite television broadcasting in Pakistan, so that our programming can be heard in this critical country. As you know, Pakistan is a leading ally in the Global War on Terrorism, while posing geopolitical challenges through the presence and development of nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems. In addition, a considerable portion of the population remains sympathetic to Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other religious fundamentalist forces.

In Afghanistan, BBG broadcast entities – Voice of America and Radio Free Europe – broadcast 24/7 in the Pashto and Dari languages. Research shows that half the people in Afghanistan are listening to us. In Kabul, we reach two-thirds of adults.

But as elsewhere in the Islamic world, television is becoming an important medium. Iranian TV is available 24/7 in Afghanistan. We need a television presence there.

In other areas of the non-Arabic speaking Muslim world – places like Indonesia, sub Saharan Africa, the horn of Africa – we’re working to expand our radio and television presence. The 9/11 Commission Report states: “To Muslim parents, terrorists like Bin Laden have nothing to offer their children but visions of violence and death ... we can offer these parents a vision that might give their children a better future.”

In reflecting on where we want to go with public diplomacy and international broadcasting, we have to understand why we, in so many areas, have found ourselves lacking.

In the decade following the end of the Cold War, many believed expenditures for U.S. international broadcasting were no longer necessary. U.S. spending for international broadcasting was slashed a very real 40%. Despite the generous support we have received in the last three years from the Bush administration and the Congress, we are fighting to rebuild from a depleted base. We are struggling to catch up to what we should be doing in strategic parts of the world.

We at the BBG have benefited from the creation inside the White House of the Office of Global Communications, as well as an understanding inside the National Security Council of the importance of our broadcasting initiatives. There would be no Alhurra today had it not been for the early enthusiastic support of the OGC for BBG initiatives. The support, acceptance, and understanding from the leadership of the OGC and the NSC is critical for our mission.

I cannot conclude this testimony without stressing the need for continued journalistic independence for BBG broadcast entities.

I have served in four Administrations in the realm of international broadcasting and this is the first time I have not seen attempts from senior government officials to interfere with our reporting of the news. We're in this for the long haul, not simply to score short-term points.

Thirty years ago, RFE/RL and VOA began broadcasting the Watergate hearings. Those broadcasts caused heartburn for many in Washington, but looking back we see they constituted a veritable civics lesson on the importance of separation of powers and rule of law. Over the years I have heard so many citizens of post-communist countries tell how those broadcasts helped them understand the real meaning of freedom and democracy.

We in America are fortunate that telling the truth works to our long-term advantage. That is why international broadcasting is so important to this country.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my formal statement. I will be happy to answer any questions that your Subcommittee might have.